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A STUDY OF THE KAREN CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT--ITS NEEDS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO WORLD CHRISTIANITY

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INTRODUCTION

The Karen Christian Movement as it has its place in the ecumenical order of world Christianity is the purpose of this study. In order to determine such a relationship it is necessary to consider two factors: the contributions that the Karens are making to world Christianity, and the needs that the Karens must have fulfilled from world Christianity.

Of necessity the study must begin with the very beginnings of the Karens. Only thus is it possible to trace the several factors which

> have contributed to the Christian development of this people, viz., an able and wise succession of missionaries; the remarkable readiness of the Karens to embrace Christianity as a result of their traditions about their "white brother" and their "lost book"; the church and school which ministered to the deep Karen desire for tribal integration; the salvaging by missionaries of the Karen language, folklore, attitudes, customs, all of which were precious to them; their condition as depressed, despised "wild people" with everything to win by identifying themselves with the white man and his religion; and finally the missionary activities of the Karens themselves.[1]

Following as a natural result of the first two chapters which deal with the beginnings and growth of Christianity among the Karens is the third chapter which presents various phases of world Christianity to which the Karens have contributed. The fourth chapter is perhaps of greatest significance in that it considers the many needs that the Karens have from world Christianity. It seeks to suggest methods of assistance which Christians everywhere might offer.

Throughout this study it is sincerely desired that there might be a personal challenge to every Christian everywhere that he might know that he, too, is a missionary.

1. Marshall, H. I. The Karen People of Burma, page 1

2. Ibid.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE KARENS

In the country of Burma which lies just south of China and to the east of India live the Karen people. Within Burma itself there is only one area that is exclusively occupied by the Karens. This is the hilly region of the Toungoo district and the Karenni subdivision. However, the Karens are scattered throughout a wider area with other peoples of the country. To locate them more exactly geographically they are found between the tenth and twenty-first degrees of north latitude and between the ninety-fourth and one hundredth degrees of east longitude. In more general terms it might be said that they occupy much of eastern Burma between the Shan States and Siam, and are found also in the Irrawaddy delta.[1]

The whole group of Karen tribes might be divided into three divisions according to differences in their language or dialect. These are the Sgaw, Pwo, and Bwe groups.

The largest of these groups is the Sgaw. It is also the most widely scattered being found all through the Irrawaddy delta, from Prome southward, and from the Arracan coast eastward to Lakong in Siam and southward to the lowest point of the Britist possessions. The Paku and Mawnepgha tribes of the southern Toungoo Hills are members of this group. Only one dialect, with slight variations, is used throughout this region.[2]

3. Ibid, page 3.

4. Christian, J. L. Modern Burma, pages 11-12.

The Pwo group is comprised of the Pwo Karen and the Taungthu tribe who are called the Pao. The Pwo are located along the seacoast from Arracan to Mergui and extend about fifty miles inland. The Taungthu are found in that area of the country which runs northward from Thaton into the Shan States beyond Taunggyi.

The Bwe tribes make their homes in the vicinity of Toungoo, in an area extending from the foothills east of the city and throughout the Karenni subdivision. Since this is a very mountainous region, the people are necessarily broken up into small tribes and differ from one another in dialect, dress, and customs.[3]

The Karens compose about one-sixth the population of Burma. This was approximately 1,340,000 people according to the Census Report for 1931 as cited by John L. Christian.[4] However, an accurate count of these people has been impossible due to the fact that so many of them have been isolated in the hills.

There has been a great deal of tradition and legend associated with the origin of the Karens. At any rate it is evident that they have not always lived in their present home.

> The most striking story is that of "Htaw Meh Pa", the mythical founder of the Karen race, who lived with his numerous family in some unknown land to the North, where their fields were ravaged by a great boar. The patriarch went out and killed the boar; but when the sons went to bring in the carcass, they could find only one tusk which had been broken off in the fray. The old man made a comb out of this, which surprised them all by its power of conveying eternal youth to all who used

5. Marshall, H. I. The Karen People of Burma, page 5

6. Ibid, page 6.

> it. Soon their country became overpopulated, and they set out to seek a new and better land. They traveled together till they came to a river called in Karen "Hti Seh Meh Ywa". Here the old man became impatient at the long time it took the members of the family to cook shellfish and went on ahead, promising to blaze his path that they might follow him through the jungle. After a while the Chinese came along and told them how to open the shells to get out the meat; and then, having eaten, they followed the old man, only to find that the plantain stalks he had cut off had shot up so high that it seemed impossible to overtake him. They, therefore, settled down in the vicinity. The patriarch went on, taking with him the magic comb which has never been discovered to this day.[5]

Although this story appears to be very unreal, Mr. Marshall believes that it might have a bearing on the origin of the Karens. The name "Hti Seh Meh Ywa" might possibly refer to the Gobi Desert, since the expression when translated means, "the River of Running Sand". Yet this seems rather far-fetched, and it is more possible that it refers to the Yellow River of China. Marshall says, according to this latter view, that

> the progenitors of the Karen probably formed a part of the southward migration (of the early tribes of Indo-China) and, at some stage of their march, stopped on the banks of the Yellow River which, as its name suggests, has from time immemorial been freighted with silt and sand. Here they may have tried to cook the shellfish referred to in the tradition. From this region they doubtless made their way down to what is now Yunnan, where perhaps they found a domicile till they were pushed farther south by migrating people advancing behind them.[6]

This assumption would seem to be more nearly correct since the Encyclopedia Britannica, in its presentation of the Karens, states that "they are supposed to be the descendants of Chinese tribes driven southwards by the pressure

7. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 13, page 281.

8. Marshall, H. I. The Karen People of Burma, pages 6-8.

9. Ibid, page 8.

of the Shan races before they were again made to retire into the hills by the expansion of the Mon power."[7]

Another link which connects the Karens with the Chinese is that the name "Karen" itself seems to have been derived from certain characters in the Chinese language. This, therefore, would lead one to believe also that the Karens had been inhabitants of the Chinese Republic in their early days.[8]

This brings us to the matter of the Karen language itself. According to the Burma Census of 1911 it was classified as belonging to the "Siamese-Chinese" sub-family of the Tibeto-Chinese languages and was grouped with the Tai or Shan. But since that date, it is very probable that this classification has been or should be revised. However, the significance of this Census Report is the connection that is made between the Karen and the Chinese.[9]

Of unusual interest, and of most recent recognition, is the racial relationship between the Karens and the Chinese that has been established by the fact that the Karens have been in possession of and used bronze drums for many generations.

> These remarkable drums have only recently been studied by Western scholars, and their full significance is still a matter for investigation. These drums were formerly thought to be of Chinese origin, but it seems that they are to be attributed to aboriginal tribes, found in what is now Tong King and Yunnan by the Chinese generals, Ma Yuon (41, A.D.) and Chu-Ko Liang (230, A.D.), who conquered these territories for the Chinese.
>
> The upper portion of the Camboja is now considered to be the original home of these drums.

10. Ibid, pages 9-10.

11. Ibid, pages 10-12.

> They formed part of the possessions of the chiefs and were considered very precious, each being worth from eight to ten oxen. Chu-ko Liang is reported to have exacted sixty-three bronze drums as tribute from the barbarians and to have taken them back with him. Among the peoples of Burma the Karen seem to be the only race that has made use of these drums. They do not manufacture them, but buy them from the more industrious Shans, who do not appear to set much store by them. Among the Karen, until recent times, the owner of one of these instruments was considered of more worth than a man who had seven elephants. A drum often formed the ransom of a village or the dowry of a maiden. Although so valued a possession often belongs to a chief, it may belong to any one who can purchase it.
>
> It may have been from the Karen that the Chinese generals exacted part or all of their tribute. If so, this people was living in the mountains of Yunnan at the beginning of the Christian era. It is a belief of the Karen that their forefathers have cherished these drums from time immemorial. One drum in Toungoo district is, I have been told, supposed to be a thousand years old. Our knowledge of them is, however, too meagre to permit any dogmatic statements on the subject. Further investigation should throw more light upon it.[10]

Marshall continues even further in establishing relationships between the Karens and the Chinese by pointing out that possibility of there existing a religious tie between the two. Since the Karens were early in possession of the story of Creation which is similar to our own Christian story which is related in the Old Testament, it has been thought possible that this Karen tradition is related to the ancient Chinese religion which was a kind of monotheism embracing one god, called the Emperor of Heaven, and who was somewhat similar to the Jehovah of the Hebrews. This connection appears to be very flimsy in its substantiation; however, it must not be overlooked.[11]

12. Ibid, pages 16-18.

Thus, in conclusion, it might be said that our best present guess is that the Karens originated in China where they were related to that country by tribal, linguistic, and possibly religious ties, and from which country they migrated into Burma.

The Karen people are a stocky and sturdy race, as is typical of most hill people. They are of medium height, the women smaller than the men. Their color varies from a light olive complexion to a dark coffee brown, and their hair is generally very long, black, and straight. In comparison they more nearly resemble the Mongolian races in their facial features than any other race. Because of their lack of bathing their bodies are unattractive, and they give a disorderly appearance from the accumulations of beads and charms that they wear. Their teeth are stained from continual betel chewing. Yet when they acquire habits of cleanliness, their appearances and personalities become pleasing and attractive.[12]

There are many curious customs among these people that tend to shape their character and their outlook on life. For example: one particular tribe, the Red Karens, used to have a rising sun tattooed on their backs; the Padaung women wear a succession of brass coils around their necks which are thereby preposterously elongated; guns, spears, daos, cross-bows, and poisoned arrows are used as weapons, and a blow-gun with poisoned darts as a quasi-toy by children; the dead are buried or exposed in boat-shaped coffins; chicken

13. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 13, page 281, Karen.

14. Marshall, H. I. The Karen People of Burma, page 75

15. Ibid., pages 84-86.

bones are used for divining, and tabu is prevalent.[13]

The chief occupation of the Karens is the cultivation of rice which is the most important article of the diet. The grain is called "paddy" during all its stages of growth and curing, until it is husked and polished ready for cooking. The method of its cultivation is very different in the hills from on the plains, due to the fact that conditions are more primitive in the hills.[14]

In the rice fields are grown different kinds of vegetables, such as gourds, beans, yams, peppers, and especially the red chili which is used for condiment. Cotton is another product which is also grown along with the rice. It stands until long after the paddy has been reaped and is called the women's crop because the women tend it.

Other products which are grown are betel-nuts, fruit, coffee, tobacco, and silk.[15]

In addition to agriculture the Karens engage in hunting, fishing, spinning, dyeing, weaving, mat-making, and basketry.

The people are by nature shy, timid, and cautious. Yet they are not without feeling. Though they may hold their peace in disagreeable circumstances, they keep the grudge in their hearts and seek revenge at a later date. They usually obtain revenge by means of magic or poison. They make friends slowly and do not admire strangers who display overtures of friendship with haste. By natural temperament they are not necessarily stubborn and unreason-

16. Ibid., pages 22-25.

17. Ibid., page 29.

18. Ibid., page 176.

able, rather they are thoughtful and consider at length before making decisions.[16]

One tragedy among these people is that they have become addicted to the use of liquor. On most occasions, even religious observances, drinking has been one of the main features. However, in places where Christianity has entered, this habit is being eliminated. Baptist churches insist upon total abstinence.[17]

Although there are few indications of love of beauty among the Karens, they are particularly fond of music. They have enjoyed primitive harps and other instruments, and they do much singing. The young women especially have lovely voices, and new tunes are learned quickly and easily by all the singers.

In spite of the heathen customs which influence the lives of these people, they are unusually moral. Their marriage laws have been more sensible than those of many other peoples. It has continued to be required that young people marry others of the same tribe. They are distantly related, but seldom ever do first cousins marry. Marriage into another tribe was heartily disapproved, and to marry into another race was entirely tabu.[18]

Although the family group is the natural unit of kinship, it does not have the final authority in village life. It is subordinate to the village unit which is the political and social center of common life. The elders of the village were obligated to pass on to younger generations all knowledge

19. Ibid., pages 127-129.

20. Ibid., page 210.

of wisdom and culture which had been revealed to them. Above the elders in authority has been the village chief. He is the chief man in the village and inherits his position. In case there is no heir to succeed the chief, the elders choose someone from their number to take the position. The purpose of all village officers is primarily for advice and guidance. They engage in their own occupations just as others in the village and are not set apart in a caste of any kind. There is no royal family nor is there even a privileged social class. Wealth forms the only basis of social distinctions in the village life, but even this is unimportant because everyone shares. The land is free and belongs to the community, hence, each man takes what he can till and there is little danger of inequality.[19]

The native religion of these people has influenced them a great deal. There have been found to be three distinct religious conceptions which have left their impressions upon the people.

> The principle underlying the most primitive religious ideas is that of an impersonal power or force residing both in men and things, but which is all-pervasive, invisible except as it betrays itself by its effect on certain things, and invincible in that it can only be overcome in a particular person or thing by a more powerful manifestation of itself in some other object... It is...a certain more or less unknown force believed to be all about and which can not be overcome. It may reside in certain individuals who, by its aid, are enabled to accomplish unusual tasks. It can be imparted to objects which, by its power, become charms potent for good or ill.[20]

The second religious conception is that of the animistic. This came about very naturally when the Karens began to

21. Ibid., pages 210-211.

22. Ibid., page 211.

assign personal attributes to the various powers about them. Thus they conceived of every unknown force as a more or less distinct personality. They personified the vegetative force in the crops; they thought of the agency that brought the dry and rainy seasons as two different demons, each ruling in the upper air during a period of six months to the exclusion of the other; they assigned lords to mountains and rivers; they believed every utensil and object about the house to be invested with separate ghosts as well as the animals out-of-doors. A few of these imaginary beings are beneficent, but most of them are malevolent, and it keeps the Karens busy a great deal of their time appeasing these evil spirits with continual offerings and sacrifices, and observing tabus.[21]

The third conception is that embodied in the "Y'wa" legend. This legend tells of the placing of the first parents in the garden by "Y'wa", the Creator, and their temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit by a serpent or dragon. This story closely resembled the creation story of the ancient Hebrews, and since it has had a very great influence on the Karen people, it has been an excellent means of contact for Christianity.[22]

Along with the "Y'wa" legend goes the story of "The Book of Silver and Gold". It has been prophesied that the white brother would return with the Lost Book. This "inspired the Karen with the hope of a better future and furnished an admirable foundation on which Christian teachers could build in promoting the development of the

23. Howard, R. L. Baptists in Burma, page 58.

Karen nation."[23]

Thus, though the Karens have many unhealthful beliefs in the supernatural, in mythical beings, in magic, in divinations and tabu, though they engage in propitiatory sacrifices and healing offerings, though they are surrounded with many religious cults, they are, nevertheless, prepared in many instances for the Christian message and can be persuaded to receive it naturally and normally.

1. Bunker, A. Soo Thah, page 13.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE AT WORK AMONG THE KARENS

> The work of evangelizing the Karens of Burma has now (1902) gone on for two generations. Its successes have constituted a miracle in modern missions. The God-given men and women who have laboured in it have been intense in character, and the work has been absorbing and all-consuming. Accordingly, those who have known it best, have found little time to weigh the achievements, or to write them up, as they deserve to be. Perhaps this would not yet be done at all if, in the providence of God, the active participants in the work, through physical disablement, were not driven home, where, coming face to face with the supporters of the Mission, endless catechizings compel the tired missionary to take an inventory of stock. From long familiarity with the work abroad, the missionary can scarcely realize how little the people at home know of the process going on in the lives of disciples just emerging from the long night of paganism.[1]

The first contact made with the Karens by a Christian missionary was accomplished by Adoniram Judson about fifteen years after he arrived in Burma. The story is an interesting one and bears relating.

> Almost as soon as Judson came to Rangoon he noticed small parties of wild-looking men that straggled past his home.
>
> "What kind of Burmans are those?" he asked.
>
> "They are not Burmans at all", his people told him; "they are Karens. They are not Buddhist, either; they worship the spirits when they worship at all. There is undying hatred between them and the Burmans, and you cannot tame them any more than you can the wild buffaloes of the mountains."
>
> But the pioneer knew that there was no tribe nor nation that the gospel could not tame, and he was the means of bringing into gospel light Ko Tha Byu, the first of the many thousands of Karen converts in Burma.

2. Hull, J. M. Judson the Pioneer, pages 161-163, 164.

> This man was, as he told his own story in later years, a wicked and ungovernable boy, and when he was about fifteen years old he ran away from his mountain home to join a company of robbers and murderers. Robbers in Burma at that time were men who by profession performed the most horrid deeds, and Ko Tha Byu became a leader among them.
>
> After the Burman war of 1826, Ko Tha Byu drifted to Rangoon, where Shwe Be, a Burman helper of Judson, bought him, according to Burman law, by paying his debt of a few rupees. But he seemed to be so stupid that his master was glad to get rid of him. Doctor Judson took him, paying Shwe Be the amount of his debt, and so becoming nominally Ko Tha Byu's master. But his only purpose was to open his eyes to the gospel, and thus reach the Karens through him.
>
> Oh, what a patient, persevering, long-suffering, never-let-go, always believing, enthusiastic man Adoniram Judson was! He went at Ko Tha Byu just as he did everything else. For months he worked over him and patiently tried to open up his stupid mind and get at any goodness there, or develop any power of self-control in him, but with little to show for his efforts. Never mind; the teaching went on, and by and by the patient, prayerful work began to prevail. Inch by inch the Sun of righteousness arose, inch by inch the darkness was driven out of Ko Tha Byu's heart, and he began to have some control over his temper, until the robber and murderer was changed into the willing, faithful follower of Christ...
>
> That was the beginning of the work among the Karens, which has been the most successful of all mission work in Burma. Judson himself never learned the Karen language, but, with Ko Tha Byu and others, he made trips to the Karen villages, and saw the spreading of the influence that began with the conversion of one wild Karen robber.[2]

Almost simultaneously, or very soon thereafter, George Dana Boardman began his work among the Karens. He established the Tavoy Mission in 1828, and worked with the people for two years, but died at the end of so short a period. However, in spite of the brevity of his service he was

3. Robbins, J. C. Boardman of Burma, page 11.

4. Titterington, S. B. History of Our Baptist Missions Among the Karens, page 6.

5. Harris, E. N. A Star in the East, page 66.

6. Titterington, S. B. History of Our Baptist Missions Among the Karens, page 7.

7. Ibid.

"the human instrument used of God to initiate...the transformation of the Karen people of Burma from a despised, down-trodden, backward race to a people with a prominent and honorable position in the life of Burma."

> He lived but thirty years, and spent only four of these years in Burma; yet his ability, character, and attainments, and, above all, the intensity and devotion of his life, were such as to leave an enduring influence. His life continues to be an inspiration to all those who love and serve their fellow men and work for the advancement of the kingdom of God.[3]

In 1831 Rev. Francis Mason came. On February 9 of that year he baptized thirty-four Karens. Mr. Boardman died on that date with the knowledge that seventy Karens had received baptism.[4]

The following year was of significance in that it brought the arrival of Rev. Jonathan Wade who reduced the Karen language to writing. Then it was possible for Mr. Mason to translate the Bible for the people.[5]

Rev. and Mrs. Justus Vinton were the next missionaries to come to labor among the Karens. They arrived in Rangoon in 1836. Their work was highly successful, and both of them were invaluable.[6]

> At first the Vintons traveled together, but the calls from distant villages were so pressing that they separated, and for twenty-four years worked in different directions. Jungle travel was far more arduous and dangerous than now, and Mrs. Vinton had many narrow escapes.
>
> Mr. Vinton was a man of strong faith and remarkable power in prayer. Before going to Burma, his record was notable in revival work. His earnestness and zeal bore fruit among the Karens.[7]

8. Ibid., pages 7-9.

Most beloved of all in Burma was Mr. Kincaid, another ardent missionary, who was sent to the Burmans, but who was given the opportunity to preach to the Karens also. His work was carried on much at the same time as the work of the Vintons, and also during that period Mr. Abbott was performing his service among the people.[8]

> The Burmans bitterly persecuted the Christian Karens. In 1835, the hostility took active form in Rangoon. Fines, imprisonment, torture, death itself, were meted out to the helpless flock. The persecution scattered the disciples, and they fled into distant provinces, preaching as they went. The operations of the missionaries at Rangoon were suspended, although they remained at their post. But in the jungles and mountain recesses the gospel was winning its glorious way, and hundreds were turning to the true God.
>
> Civil war added its horrors in 1837, but it could not stop God's work among the Karens. Rev. E. L. Abbott traveled through the districts of Maubee and Pantenau to Bassein. His journey was like a triumphal march. One of the converts was a promising young chief. The political troubles forced the missionaries to leave Burman dominions, and they went to Arakan for the protection of the British flag. News came in 1839 that this man was preaching continually, and that one thousand persons were waiting to be baptized.
>
> The Yoma Mountains separate this province from Burma. Messrs. Kincaid and Abbott sought to keep a watch over their distant flocks from behind the mountains. Mr. Abbott at Sandoway sent word to his Karens that their teacher was in Arakan. The Burmans jealously watched the mountain passes, but despite their vigilance, large companies flocked across the hills for baptism and instruction. So many of the four thousand Karens in Burma fled to Arakan that the Burman governor, fearing their emigration in a body, issued a decree of religious liberty, which, however, was not to be trusted. The exiles in Arakan found freedom to worship God, but the deadly climate decimated their ranks. Cholera raged and claimed many victims. No pen can picture what these persecuted Karens suffered for conscience' sake. Mr. Abbott, alone and

9. Ibid, pages 8-10.

> unaided, was crushed with the burden of caring for this devoted people from behind the hills of Arakan. It was a task for ten men. In a single year he buried his wife and two children. The climate was fever breeding, and in 1845 he was obliged to seek rest in America.[9]

Such were the contributions of the early missionaries among the Karens. And thus do we have a glimpse of the struggles that they had to make for the sake of their task and also the struggles that their converts had to make to keep alive in this new life that had been offered to them by their Lord and Saviour.

The earliest date of the founding of educational institutions is 1836 at which time a seminary was established at Tavoy and was in charge of Mr. Wade. Its purpose was to train both Karen and Burma preachers. Twelve of the first eighteen pupils were Karens. For a time all the books were in manuscript, but by 1837 type was prepared and books were printed. By 1839 several Karen schools were being supported by Tavoy.

Since there was a very rapid increase of Karen churches, the need for a trained native ministry became very acute. Consequently, in 1845 a Karen Theological Seminary was organized and opened at Moulmein by Rev. J. G. Binney. Very soon thereafter a preparatory school was opened at Tavoy by Rev. E. B. Cross. Thirty-six students were enrolled at Moulmein at the end of the first year.

During the years that followed more schools were established and their work was of value. Mrs. Binney opened a Karen Girls' Normal School in Moulmein, and the

preparatory school at Tavoy continued in its work along with a similar school at Sandoway.

The Theological Seminary gave evidence of such thorough and valuable work as the years passed that it was decided it was to constitute a general Karen Theological School for all of Burma. However, due to the deliberation of the Deputation from America who were in conference with the missionaries of Burma, it was necessary for the school to be suspended for a brief time. But it was re-opened in 1854 under the supervision of Dr. Wade. He continued in charge of the Seminary until the return of Dr. Binney in 1860. The institution had continued to grow in value and importance with the rapid growth of the Karen missions. With the return of Dr. Binney the school was removed to Rangoon.

Then followed great adversity for the missionary field in Burma. The Civil War had struck in America, and during the years of its strife, very little money was sent to the foreign field. Many schools were necessarily closed in Burma, and some of the mission stations were even without a resident missionary. Hence, it was even more important to support the Karen Seminary in order that more native leaders might be trained in this time of great need. And in spite of the lack of help, the mission work went forward. A normal school for Karen boys was established in Moulmein, and the churches supported a Young Men's Normal School at Toungoo.

10. Ibid., page 21.

11. Ibid., page 23.

By this time Mr. C. H. Carpenter had arrived at Rangoon, and this is the picture he penned:

> I wish you could see Dr. Binney's sixty-two barefooted, bare-legged students of theology. They are all crowded into a one-story building. They probably do not taste of meat once a week. Their food consists mainly of paddy (unhulled rice), which they pound out for themselves. They submit to all this cheerfully, and dig like good fellows for the sake of knowledge, and the ability to read understandingly, and to expound to their countrymen the Karen Bible.[10]

When Dr. Binney retired from the Seminary in 1865, Mr. Carpenter and Rev. D. A. W. Smith, who had been associated with him for three years, assumed the charge. Also, with the death of Mr. Abbott, his associate, Rev. J. S. Beecher, took over his work. He established the Sgau Karen Normal and Industrial Institute which flourished well in those days. The Karens paid for the school buildings themselves, and in recognition of Karen loyalty and service during the war, the Government granted them a beautiful site of ten acres which would be free from taxes as long as it was used for missionary purposes.[11]

By this time self-support in the Bassein Mission was developing wonderfully. The people there were more anxious for education than in any other province, and they insisted upon having schools with the very best teachers that could be secured.

> When Mr. Carpenter reached Bassein, in 1868, he found the school buildings nearly in ruins. He proposed a plan whereby in ten years commodious buildings could be secured without expending a dollar of American money. At first they were appalled by the magnitude of the undertaking, but the result was so overwhelming, that they willingly

12. Ibid., page 25.

13. Ibid., page 31.

> assumed the endowment of the school. Not only did they contribute to these home interests, but they also sent missionaries into the regions beyond.[12]

Since the Roman Catholics were offering advantages for higher education, the Baptists realized that they must give their converts equal opportunities. Consequently, the Rangoon Baptist College was formally opened on May 28, 1872, and was under the charge of Dr. Binney and Rev. John Packer. In 1874 Mr. Carpenter became president of the college, but resigned in 1875 to return to Bassein. This same year, 1874, Mr. Smith became the official president of the theological seminary.

The Bassein Association continued in its miraculous work.

> ...in 1875, the Sgau Karens resolved to raise a special building fund of twenty thousand rupees in three years, for the Bassein Normal and Industrial School. About twelve thousand rupees had previously been raised for permanent school buildings, making a total of about thirty-two thousand rupees for education.[13]

Thus, in 1878, a fine commodious building was erected by the Karens for the Bassein Normal and Industrial Institute. It was dedicated on May 16 of that year, which marked the fiftieth anniversary of the baptism of the "Karen Apostle", Ko Tha Byu, and was called the Ko Tha Byu Memorial Hall. It accommodated three hundred boarding pupils. During this year the Bassein Karens contributed fifty thousand rupees for religious and educational purposes. Later, there was established the E. L. Abbott Endowment Fund which amounted to thirteen thousand six hundred and ninety-nine dollars

14. Ibid., page 35.

and fifty cents in 1884.

In this same Karen jubilee year of 1878 Mr. D. L. Brayton completed the Bible in Pwo Karen. It represented thirty years of diligent work.

Rangoon Baptist College continued to progress and in 1879 possessed a fine new building. However, the theological seminary was not so fortunate that year. A mysterious disease called beri-beri broke out and caused a great deal of death and suffering among the students. Consequently, it was necessary to purchase, in 1890, a new location at Insein, nine miles from Rangoon, on the Prome Railroad. Gradually the school was moved from the infected buildings.[14]

Thus we have the picture of the beginning and growth of theological schools, normal schools, and preparatory schools among the Karens. There has continued to be founded additional schools as time has passed, and the educational standards have been raised, and enrollments increased. And although it is of value to note the progress made in the educational field of the Karens, our foremost interest lies immediately in the growth of Christianity among these people and the many influences that have fostered that growth. For obvious reasons, therefore, we turn to a more general account of the evidences of Christian expansion among the Karens.

From the baptism of the first Karen convert, Ko Tha Byu, on May 16, 1828, there has been a steady, yet not always an uninterrupted, growth in the numbers of Karens

15. Marshall, H. I. The Karen People of Burma, page 300.

16. Fleming, D. J. "The Church in Burma" from the Laymen's Missions Inquiry, Vol. IV. pages 579-580, 583.

that have become Christian. Of course the beginning of the spread of the gospel among them was slow. Ko Tha Byu had served as the necessary contact with the Karens, yet it took time to win them in any great number.

By the time of Mr. Boardman's death in 1831, seventy Karens had been baptized which was not a discouraging number. Those who were converted were true missionaries themselves, and each attempted to spread the "good news" among his countrymen.

> Careful statistics do not appear to have been kept during the early years of the Baptist Mission, and it is, therefore, difficult to discover how many of the Karen became Christians. In 1856 eleven thousand, eight hundred and seventy-eight communicants were reported, but this number includes many estimated returns. From that time on there has been an almost steady increase in the membership of the Baptist Mission, which numbered in 1919 fifty-five thousand, three hundred and fifty-three communicants enrolled in Karen churches, representing a nominal Christian community of two hundred thousand souls.[15]

In 1921 the total Christian community of Burma--this includes both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians--numbered 257,106. Of this total, the Karen group numbered 178,225, of which 141,719 were Protestants and 36,506 were Roman Catholic. Thus out of every ten Christians, seven were Karen. Also, the Karen church formed 73 per cent of the Baptist constituency in Burma, which in turn composed one-third of the communicants associated with the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in its work throughout the world. In more specific numbers it is reported that there were 977 Baptist churches among the Karens in the same year, 1921.[16]

17. Carpenter, C. H. Self-Support in Bassein, pages 389-390.

From a very early date the Karen churches and mission schools attempted to support themselves. As has already been pointed out, the Bassein Mission was a pioneer in this theory. It might be well to consider the principles by which the work was uniformly shaped there. C. H. Carpenter states these principles as follows:

> (a) While all Christians, women and children as well as men, are bidden to bear a part in the direct work of evangelization, it is a grave question whether God calls to exclusively religious labor a larger proportion of his church in any land than can be supported, as well as the average membership live, from local sources. The command, "Go ye into all the world," etc., undoubtedly requires the personal service of a far greater number of the ablest men than have as yet responded; but it does not (in our judgment) include for Christians at home the duty of subsidizing foreign churches, or of affording regular support to any of the converts who may be made.
>
> (b) It is certain that the mere fact of a foreign missionary dispensing considerable sums of foreign money from month to month mars his influence.
>
> (c) It is deleterious to the native preacher himself, and to the native church, to receive foreign aid.
>
> (d) It puts the native preacher in a false light before the heathen, and seriously diminishes his usefulness.
>
> (e) The apostle Paul suffered neither in character nor influence from making tents, elsewhere than in Philippi; nor will the native preacher thus suffer, if, in default of a comfortable support from his own brethren, he ekes out the supply of his necessities, like the Baptist ministry of a former generation in America, by the labor of his own hands or brain for a portion of his time.[17]

Whether we agree with these principles or not is not the subject for discussion. The significance is that the

18. Fleming, D. J. Op. Cit., page 579.

19. Marshall, H. I. Op. Cit., page 300

20. Davis, J. M. "The Karen Church" from The Economic Basis of the Church, "The Madras Series", Vol. V. pages 435-436.

Karens have managed to maintain self-support in so many instances. According to the 1921 statistics of the 977 Baptist churches among the Karens, 98 per cent were self-supporting.[18]

In 1919

> there were nineteen thousand, four hundred and twenty pupils in the Karen mission schools, including both the Anglo-vernacular and the village-vernacular schools, the converts contributing 375,426 rupees or $125,142 toward the maintenance of these. Not only do the Karen Christians contribute to the support of their schools, but also to that of their churches and pastors. For this purpose they expended 38,596 rupees or $12,856 in 1919. In the same year they gave to benevolences outside of their own fields 152,203 rupees ($50,734) for home and foreign missionary work and 184,627 rupees ($61,532), making a total of 375,426 rupees or $125,122 for all purposes (in addition to the $125,142 given for schools.)[19]

The methods which the Karens use in order to support their Christian program are very ordinary. In most cases they just simply give the money. The amount of a Christian's income seldom determines the amount that he will give. Very often the poor people give much more than the wealthier ones. However, in some cases, such as among teachers there is tithing, but little otherwise. The Lord's Acre Plan, a plan whereby land is set aside and the produce harvested from it, is occasionally used for the support of schools. But most of the funds are raised by church offerings and subscriptions.[20]

In 1853 Mr. Harris founded the Karen Mission at Shwegyin on the basis of complete self-support. The work was advanced only as fast as the Karens were willing to under-

21. Ibid., page 434.

22. Ibid., page 432.

23. Marshall, H. I. Op. Cit., page 303.

take it and to contribute the money to it. Absolute financial independence has been in the district ever since.[21]

The Karen Mission at Shwegyin is just one outstanding example of self-support among the Karens. Christian work among them in most places is independent and self-supporting. It is said that "the independent Karen Church of Burma is a classic example of complete financial independence among the younger churches of Asia."[22] Thus it has extended its influence out into a wide area.

It is true that the Karen Christians grew rapidly in numbers and in their ability to support their Christian institutions. However, such growth is unimportant if it is not accompanied by true spiritual growth, the building of strong Christian character, and marked moral uplift. Concerning this matter Marshall says,

> In the past it has been too much the custom to place undue emphasis on creed and dogma. The development of character through Christian experience is the primary object to be attained, and without the formation of admirable character no abiding result can be achieved. The Baptist Mission--I can not speak for the others, although they may maintain similar ideals--demands total abstinence and the surrender of all animistic religious practices as prerequisites for church-membership. The Baptist denomination is convinced that these requirements have been the means of social and economic progress, although the enforcement of them has tended to limit the growth in numbers. No doubt, much may still be done in the way of character-building among the members of the churches; but when we consider the environment of the people and the fact that they have had less than a century of Christian development, may we not say that they have made remarkable progress.[23]

This is a valuable summary made by Marshall, yet there

24. Harris, E. N. Op. Cit., page 193,ff.

25. Ibid., page 97.

are some specific factors which need to be considered. First of all, it is necessary to remember that the Karens are an agricultural people and that therefore Christianity among them must be a rural type of ministry. In the first days of promoting education it was too often found that the Karens were taught along the traditional lines of education. Then as they went back to their farms they were little better prepared to lift their standards of living, especially in the economic sense, than they had been before. However, as the work of education has evolved it has been changed to prepare the Karen for his rural life and has become a more effective ministry.[24]

A second factor that warrants consideration is the theology of the Karen Christians. As has been indicated in the foregoing paragraph an attempt has been made to instil within the Karen the type of religion that will meet his daily life. Then the Karens have found the true Christian way of life just as Christians in America have. They have the same precious hope in the gospel, the same consolations of the Spirit, and the same source of power. With the Karens one can enjoy Christian fellowship in just as rich and abundant and satisfying measure as he can find it anywhere.

> Many of the pastors of churches are truly men of God, and the missionary soon learns to take counsel with them and to value their helpful advice. Most of them are better versed in the contents of Scripture than the average American pastor, and to the preaching of some of them any one might listen with interest and profit.[25]

CHAPTER III

KAREN ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO WORLD CHRISTIANITY

The two foregoing chapters have constituted a presentation of the Karen people as they began to receive the Christian gospel and as they grew in Christianity. It is important in the study of any movement among any peoples to realize that it is not just a one-sided affair, but that there is always a sharing of values. Thus, we cannot assume that the Christianization process of the Karens has been a matter of all "take" on the part of the native people with a corresponding of all "give" on the part of the white missionary and his home supporters. Instead, there is an intermingling of the two forces: the native has given as well as received, and the missionary has been a recipient as well as a giver. There is value, therefore, in an attempt to present some of the Karen contributions to world Christianity.

In the first place, the Karens have produced some outstanding Christian leaders who have lent their influence to world Christianity. With the very first Karen convert, Ko Tha Byu, a "Karen Apostle" was born. He was ignorant and certainly unpolished, yet he was a naturally gifted missionary. J. C. Robbins says this of him:

> God did indeed have a work for Ko Tha Byu. This wild Karen robber-murderer had become a new creature in Christ Jesus, and he went out as a flaming apostle to the Karen villages, telling in his own simple but positive way the story of God's love and forgiveness. The fall of man,

1. Robbins, J. C. Op. Cit., page 99.

2. Harris, E. N. Op. Cit., pages 61-62.

> man's need of a Savior, the fullness of Christ, the blessedness of heaven--these were his subjects, and as one who had heard him said, "He used these thoughts like an auger in drilling a rock: It was round, round, round, and round, round, round, until the object was accomplished."[1]

Ko Tha Byu was not the only leader, though he has been remembered more than any of the others for his work. In the very beginning other leaders of like apostolic fervor arose. Two of these were Saw Tah Ree and Saw Doo Moo of Shwegyin.

> Saw Doo Moo also was prepared by God in a remarkable manner for the preaching of the gospel among his people. Living some distance to the north of Shwegyin, he rose one morning with his wife and children in their accustomed health, but at sundown that day the wife and all the children except a nursing infant were dead, having been stricken down by that dreadful scourge, the cholera. Distracted with grief, he left the little one in the care of a friendly Burmese woman, and then wandered forth not caring whither he went, ...rose early in the morning and went on all day long, stopping wherever night overtook him, rose again early the next day, and wandered on, week after week, until at last he was found by some Christian Karens down near Mergui, hundreds of miles away from his home. He told them the story of his grief, and they on their part told him of the balm in Gilead. He believed. His wounded heart was healed. He returned as far as Maulmein, entered the little school which the missionaries had prepared for the training of evangelists, learned to read, studied the Scriptures, and when Mr. Harris went to Shwegyin to found the mission there, or soon after, he was ready to go with him, and largely through the preaching of these two men, Saw Tah Ree and Saw Doo Moo, during the first year of Mr. Harris's ministry on that field, there were no fewer than five hundred and seventy-seven converts.[2]

The Karen people have been pioneers in frontier teaching. They have been intensely missionary-minded people, and have gone out into previously unvisited areas

3. Harris, E. N. Op. Cit., pages 109-114.

where they have taken the gospel and fostered education. With the setting up of churches there have been corresponding schools which have sought to educate the natives in every area that could be reached.

As the Karen churches of Burma have given they have gained, as they have scattered they have found increase, and as they have sent their missionaries afar to minister to the needy their own resources have developed. The Karens of Bassein have representatives in distant parts of northern Burma, and the Rangoon Karens have sent some of their number into far-off Siam. As the Shwegyin station began outside work they prospered. Young men from there went to the theological seminary at Insein to prepare themselves for the work of the gospel ministry. At the same time schools were built up at the out-stations from Shwegyin. Many pupils came from heathen villages and thus the schools became evangelizing agencies reaching out into the outlying regions in a way which, so far as one can judge, would not otherwise have been possible. In one case the Karens were even unselfish enough that they chose their most beloved pastor and the one who was vitally needed at home and sent him to the distant field to replace the evangelist who had died there.[3]

The Karens have not only influenced their own people and other surrounding areas, but they have reached out into further parts of the world. In education they have brought their influence as far as America itself in that they have

4. Marshall, H. I. Op. Cit., page 310.

5. Robbins, J. C. Op. Cit., page 165.

sent students to our schools, and certainly we have gained from their presence as well as their own country upon their return.

> Perhaps the most prominent Karen, the Hon. Dr. San C. Po, is a physician, graduate of an American medical college, who has served for several years in the Legislative Council of the province of Burma, being the first member of his race to be thus honored.[4]

Statistics from the 1939 Annual Report of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society indicated that there were three Karens in Burma's Senate and twelve in the House of Representatives.[5] Thus, the Karens have risen to exert their influence in their own nation and throughout the world.

The policy of self-support among the Karens has been discussed at some length previously. However, it is of significance at this point to re-emphasize the influence such a policy has had on Christianity at large. It has not only been of great help to relieve the mission source of supply at home, but it has served to be a valuable example to all mission fields. However, it is important that this term "self-support" be not misunderstood.

> It has been said that the churches are self-supporting. By this is not meant that they support their pastors in every case as churches in America do, but simply that they are not dependent upon mission funds from America. So far from the church supporting the pastor, it often happens that the pastor supports himself or may even support the church. This custom has come down from the early beginning of the work. At that time, the leading man in each church was appointed its pastor. Most of the men who were thus chosen had their own means of support, and needed no help from their churches. Furthermore, many of them were

6. Harris, E. N. Op. Cit., pages 102-103.

7. Fleming, D. J. Op. Cit., page 645.

> men of foresight and initiative, and when they saw the advantages of being under British government, they took up land or started enterprises which were later of value to their people. Such being the precedent established, the successors of those early pioneer pastors have had, for the most part, to find their own means of support. This has not been as great a hardship, however, as might at first appear, for few of them are men of sufficient training to be capable of spending all their time in the preparation of sermons and the other work of the church. When, however, a pastor or any other Christian worker has that capacity, he is usually given a fair living; and in general, with changed conditions an increasing number of churches are supporting their pastors in full.[6]

This quotation from Mr. Harris is not intended to change the emphasis of the value of self-support but is to serve as a clarification of this policy. The Karen people are to be commended for their progress in this direction and for the influence they have exerted.

> Inspiring individual instances of giving are by no means uncommon--a man at the price of an elephant pays all the expenses of entertaining the Baptist Association in his village; another with slender means pledges $500 for a dormitory; another fully supports a worker; not far from the Chinese border is a Christian woman who on her own responsibility and at her own expense is running a boarding school of eighty pupils.[7]

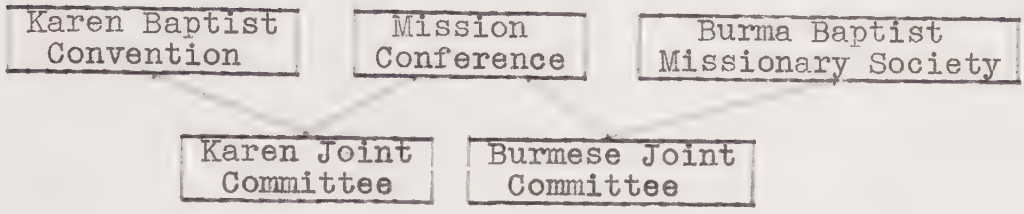
Because of the very high self-support in schools, the problem of devolution (self-management) has arisen. Some steps have been taken in this direction, and they are worthy of notice. In 1928 two "Joint Committees" were established--one with Burmese and one with Karens. "On each of these committees there are from nine to twelve nationals and only three missionaries; and to these intermediate bodies the American Baptists hand over their

8. Ibid., page 596.

9. Ibid.

appropriations for evangelistic and educational work."[8] Perhaps a simple chart will clarify the relationship.

RELATION OF CHURCH AND MISSION



Ultimately it is hoped that one committee can be made to do the work of the two separate joint committees so that further unification will be possible.

The establishment of local committees was the second part of the plan in devolution.

> As a rule every field has an evangelistic committee consisting of the missionary and nationals chosen by the churches, and in each suitable town there is a similar school committee. The Joint Committees allocate funds received from America for Burma to these local committees which are responsible for administration. An occasional missionary complains that his work is hampered, that he is left without a helper, or that the district is not properly cared for. However, in forming these local committees it is recognized that fundamental training for larger responsibility comes through this shouldering of responsibility by stations.[9]

It is the consensus of opinion that the management of schools, with possibly some support from America, can be turned over to nationals any time within the next fifteen years. It is also agreed that in the meantime missions should direct their energies to the training of suitable leadership to take over this management. To do this an

10. Sipple, L. B. "Mission Education in Burma" from the Laymen's Missions Inquiry, Vol. IV, page 666.

11. Ibid.

increasing number of men and women should be sent to America to take training in educational techniques.[10]

Although there have been constructive steps taken in the direction of devolution, the Karens are of the opinion, in spite of their great degree of self-support, that missionary direction will be needed for some time yet. However, they would prefer, and possibly insist, that American educators take places on school staffs under native management, and in the capacity of expert teachers and advisers.[11]

Thus, the Karens have continued to move forward and to pioneer in progressive methods of administration which are exemplary and contributory to world Christianity.

The year 1938 was one of significance for the Karens. On the celebration of their New Year which comes at the turn of the moon in December, a group of Karen leaders sent broadcast a remarkable appeal to the Karen people. Since the manifesto was such a mark of progress for them it is worthy of being noted at this point.

> "This is an historic day. It is our first officially recognized National Day. It is a day of opportunity. We are emerging from isolation into the stream of national affairs. Our conviction is that our two million Karens have a significant part to play in Burma's destiny.
>
> We owe our existence as a people not to organization or any political arrangements but to certain distinctive qualities that have been given up. Our traits include simplicity, a love of music, honesty, steadiness and a sense of God. We believe that we can best keep and develop these characteristics in free association with other peoples.
>
> We are at a crisis. For us the choice lies between seeking protection through isolation, or

12. Thra Chit Maung "The Karen Church of Burma" from The Growing Church, Vol. II of "The Madras Series", pages 228-229.

13. "List of Members of the International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras,"Chap. XXI of Addresses and Other Records, Vol. VII of "The Madras Series", pages 178-179.

14. "The Burma News", June, 1946, page 21, (Report on the Thirty-Fourth Session of the All Burma Bible Assembly)

> adventure through active participation in the life of Burma. United ourselves we could help to make Burma a nation. We recognize that as leaders we must be fully committed to our country--free from fear, personal ambition, racial and religious prejudice.
>
> Today we recall our heritage, our ancient poets and prophets and our tradition of Ywa (God). We believe every individual, every home, every village has a place in the new advance. Progressive in thinking, constructive in planning, and courageous in living, we can share responsibility with other communities for the making of Burma into a united people.
>
> Are we ready on this New Year's Day to put the best traditions of our people at the service of this whole country?"[12]

At approximately the same time, December 12th to the 29th to be exact, the Karens were reaching out and participating in the world missionary movement by sending delegates to the Meeting of the International Missionary Council, at Tambaram, Madras, India.[13]

Nor has the War put a complete stop to their activity. "The Burma News" for June, 1946, reports that the Burma Bible Assembly met in its thirty-fourth session. Of the 90 delegates, 48 of them were Karen, the largest group from any one part of Burma.[14]

In many areas the Karens have potentialities which have been undeveloped so far. One of their great talents lies in the field of music. Yet it has been almost impossible to persuade them to put their own music into their Christianity. This is partially due to their natural shyness. Mr. Marshall indicates this when he writes:

> While traveling in the hill country I was delighted one evening with the sweet voice of a young woman,

15. Marshall, H. I. Op. Cit., page 29.

16. Harris, E. N. Op. Cit., page 132.

17. Fleming, D. J. Op.Cit., page 625.

> which came floating up from the stream where she was drawing water. She was singing an old "hta" or poem, while I listened unobserved behind a clump of bamboos. No sooner did I step into the open than she ceased, and I could not persuade her to continue the song.[15]

Many of the Karens are fine singers, and there has been some recognition of their ability.

> The native singing of the Karens...ordinarily covers a range of only a few notes, but, while the quality is not very good, at least it is not raucous. A few native airs are still sung by the Christians, suitable hymns having been composed to go with them. They are weird and of pleasing melody. For the rest, the Christian Karens... have adopted western tunes. In the average congregation, even in far-off jungle villages, every one will be singing; and the Karen Christian may not have a bible, but he is almost sure to have a hymn book. This wondrous gift of song goes far to compensate for other deficiencies.[16]

With the acceptance of Christianity the Karens have almost entirely dropped their own music for that of the West. This is to be regretted. The reason for it is not certain. It is possible that they wish to leave behind them all their pre-Christian life and adopt the new even to the extent of Western hymns which seem to appeal to them very much. However, Rev. E. N. Harris has preserved a few Karen melodies by adapting them to hymns and incorporating them in their own hymnbook.

> The Baptist Karen hymnal contains 588 hymns, of which about 500 are translations, while only four are compositions by Karens. There are three Karen tunes; but inquiry from the pastor of one of the largest Karen churches showed that not once in this church during the past year had a Karen tune been used, nor did he desire any more Karen tunes. He knew only of one original Karen hymn. It seems that "Translations satisfy, Western tunes satisfy."[17]

18. Ibid., page 627.

Regardless of how well the Western tunes seem to satisfy the Karen, there is danger of failure to reach the non-Christian Karen and to lead him into a personal experience of God. This danger has been brought out in conferences with both the Karens and the Burmese. The Burmese indicate that they need Burmese tunes for converts who have been raised as Buddhists and are unable in later life to learn Western music. They also agree that for the most effective evangelism doubtless both English and Burmese tunes are needed. The observation has been that village non-Christians will listen out of curiosity to Western music but their hearts will not be reached until they can sing the gospel songs themselves in their own language.[18]

World Christianity has received and shared a great deal with the Karen Christian movement, yet the Karens have even more to offer, and continue to present ever-promising potentialities which need to be recognized, enhanced and better utilized.

1. Harris, E. N. Op. Cit., Chapter XII.

CHAPTER IV

KAREN NEEDS FROM OTHER CHRISTIANS TODAY

Just as every man needs a friend to share in his life so the Karens will always need friends to share in and help them with their Christianity. No country or group of people can ever reach complete independence either physically or spiritually no matter how efficient, capable, or self-supporting they may become. The need of interdependence will always, and rightfully so, be present.

With the Karens there are more than mere temporal needs to be fulfilled. There are needs which constantly recur and which demand a continued filling and refilling from friends around the world.

Perhaps the most important of these needs is that of leadership. It is true that the Karen churches and schools are mostly self-supporting, and that definite steps have been taken toward devolution, yet it has also been pointed out that there is still a great need for missionaries on the field.[1] And as has been said before, undoubtedly the status of the missionary should change to that of an advisory capacity because certainly indigenous leaders should be trained and encouraged to accept places of responsibility.

As time progresses the need for experts in specific fields arises. The natives need specialists in agriculture, in economics, in medicine, in public health, and in other areas, to come into their country and teach them how to

2. Ibid., pages 197-209.

acquire a higher and more Christian standard of living.[2] However, care should be taken in the selection of these specialists to make certain they are first of all Christian and secondly vocationally expert.

Although the Karens have become self-supporting in a great measure, there is still a great need for financial assistance from across the waters. The natives are generally very poor, and consequently must live on a very low standard. A continued supply of money is necessary in order that they might be lifted above such a level and given that financial security that will make for them a better way of life. There are many uses to make of this money sent from foreign friends. There is need for building, for progress in medicine, for better and more schools, for a more abundant home life, and any number of other things. Of course these features have not always been looked upon as part of mission work, yet they are in reality of utmost importance. Mr. Harris is in agreement with this opinion throughout his chapter which he entitles "A Neglected Opportunity". Here he outlines in definite steps a plan for ministering to these needs and he ends it significantly as follows:

> The total result would be to increase greatly the prosperity of the Karen people, advance them in civilization as perhaps could be done in no other way, and give them a truer conception of the many-sided completeness and adequacy of the Christian religion. And the expense, if the plan were carried out gradually in a modest way need not be very great.
>
> Millions are being generously given today for literary colleges, and tens of millions for medical schools in the Orient. Where are the

3. Harris, E. N. Op. Cit., page 209.

4. Marshall, H. I. Op. Cit., pages 301-303.

> thousands to come from which will help not only to advance an entire race along the lines of improved scientific agriculture, but also to make progress in all true culture and excellence?[3]

Marshall also places a great deal of importance on those things which will elevate the native's way of life when he says:

> The most significant of these features are the education of the children, the training of the men to become intelligent leaders in their communities, and the inculcation among the women of better ideals as home-keepers, all contributing to the elevation of the people. If these results are not measurably attained by the mission work at the present time, it is regarded as falling short of its proper aims.[4]

Though much has been said in favor of the policy of self-support and devolution, it is not to be overlooked that the Karens are still in need of assistance from the educational standpoint. They are not yet ready to cut off all help from the outside, and no matter how independent they may become,new ideas and better methods will always be welcomed from their Western friends. The need for this partial dependence is very aptly described below.

> The Karen church has gone through periods of birth pangs and robust childhood and they are now in what one would call the adolescent period. Under missionary management, they have grown to be constituencies large enough to control themselves, and when they are called upon to do so, they find that their different limbs are rather too big to control. As an adolescent boy finds himself awkward in controlling his limbs, so are the Karens finding themselves. They have been taught to do things but they have not received enough training to take the lead and organize. However, as responsibilities are thrust upon them they are rising to the occasion and adapting themselves to the new situation in an admirable and speedy way. As growth has not been uniform in all the Karen fields, since

5. Thra Chit Maung Op. Cit., pages 226-227.

6. Harris, E. N. Op. Cit., page 173.

> some are in the backward tract, the devolution and evolution policy of the sending churches has not attained equal success. In two fields the making over of the management to the indigenous leaders led to revolution or riot. In one of these two fields, the Karens themselves passed a resolution to make over the management to the missionary.[5]

Always in any group there will be the need for spiritual encouragement from other Christians everywhere.

> The Karen Christians of Burma may, in many respects, challenge comparison with the people of God anywhere, but...they have not back of them that long tradition of Christian life and service and doctrine which have made their western brethren strong.[6]

This privilege of bestowing spiritual encouragement upon the converts of Jesus Christ too often lies within the hands of the missionary only. This is failure on the part of other Christians. Certainly it is not only our privilege but also our obligation as followers of Jesus Christ to contribute to the spiritual growth of our fellow Christians the world around that they might know that "deep and abiding peace."

In the midst of constructive growth and progress the work among the Karens has been suddenly interrupted, retarded, and in many ways destroyed, by the havoc wrought by World War II. The description of Rangoon as recorded in "The Burma News", June, 1946, is typical of the destruction in Burma.

> Imagine your own area, with wiring and electric fixtures torn out of houses, plumbing fixtures, shelves, woodwork and anything else easily removable gone. Buildings at best only completely empty shells, more often lacking parts of walls, floors, or roofs. No repairs made for four years or more.

7. "The Burma News", June, 1946, page 2.

8. Howard, R. L. from a report letter dated Sept. 23, 1946.

> Every roof leaking. No electricity, kerosene available on ration and only at rate of one bottle per person per week. No public transport system and motor vehicles unavailable. Water in street mains which leak so that there is insufficient pressure to take water into houses. Sewage system still only partially restored. No goods, supplies, cloth, materials of almost any kind, available legitimately. Practically all purchases limited to the black market where one buys civilian loot or goods stolen from the military. Contractors and workmen almost unavailable and when available without tools or materials with which to work. Colour everything with a luxurious growth of mould resulting from an unusually heavy and early monsoon rainfall. Sprinkle with large brown cockroaches, mice, rats, squirrels, geckos, tauktoos, dogs, and one cat. Blacken the sky with heavy monsoon clouds. Then perchance you will have a fairly adequate mental picture of the conditions.[7]

Dr. Howard describes Toungoo as the place which gave the most appalling testimony to the wastage of war. It was once a substantial town but now it is a place of bamboo huts. All that was left of the group of school buildings was the walls of one brick unit. Now that has a thatch roof and bamboo windows and floor.[8]

Such has been the destruction in Burma's cities, towns, and villages. And thus many specific and immediate needs have arisen.

From our knowledge of the destruction the most visual need is that of replacing buildings and property. Schools and churches have been destroyed, and possessions stolen. To replace these physical necessities people from across the waters must give their utmost in money and in available goods. It is well to consider the opinion of someone who is on the field at this point. And so we turn to Dr. Howard

9. Ibid.

again to quote from his letter (slightly condensed) of September 23, 1946.

> Unless American help is forthcoming, the Karens just cannot reestablish their Christian schools. This is a very important matter in a country where Buddhists will dominate the government and where state schools are likely to be definitely colored by the religion of the dominant group. Self-support has been the Karen's slogan for many years...We have felt they would rally to the need and they have done so; but to-day a building in bamboo costs almost as much as a pre-war teak one. The considerable amounts the people have raised have gone into the simplest shelters against the weather. They need help to build more permanently...
>
> The Japanese, when they retreated went over the Mawchi...Rd, through the center of the Karen country. They liked the flowers of the betal-nut trees; the West Africans who pursued them liked the oranges. Both cut down the trees to get what they wanted. Thus were destroyed two money-making crops that will take fifteen years to replace... Between the two armies many Karen churches were destroyed...We estimate there should be about $36,000 dollars for helping these people rebuild their churches...We must help them to give real substance and beauty to their structures. It is out of the spirit of the people and their deep desire to do everything possible for themselves that one draws strength.[9]

If one were to visit the country, he would be instantly aware of the great need for rebuilding the physical health of the people. Their bodies have been wracked with disease, and many are in the process of dying from starvation--dying to join their brothers who have already succumbed from the lack of food. Again the Karens look to America for the bread that will save their very lives.

> Relief supplies are reaching Burma, though the problem of distribution and the prevention of theft is a tremendous one. A shipment of 8,000 bundles sent to Burma by the Church Committee on Overseas Relief and Reconstruction

10. "Sunrise in Burma" from Together, Dec., 1946, page 21.

11. Thra Amos Pokey "Report from Tavoy" from The Burma News, pages 23-24.

> arrived in time for Christmas distribution throughout the province. Large quantities of dried milk, vitamins, hospital supplies, medicines, and relief clothing have been received and distributed as far north as Tiddim in the Chin Hills, Kengtung in the Shan States, Namkham and Bhamo, and as far south as Tavoy and Mergui. Church World Service recently budgeted another $50,000 for Burma Relief for a period of three months and double that amount for the succeeding six months.[10]

Yet, in spite of the tremendous physical hardships, the **Karens** are making the best of their situation, and they are exceedingly grateful for any little bit that they are given. Thra Amos Pokey reports the following from Tavoy in "The Burma News" for June, 1946:

> At Gaungzin the Karens gathered in a very large number...to celebrate Christmas...There must be over 300 present and many were in rags and in barks of trees to cover their nakedness yet the happiness was there and Pastor Ah Du was so glad and happy that he took part in sports, in concert, and in other activities throughout the day and night and returning the next day without any rest, he was down with malaria and had to be taken to the hospital where he had to take his rest for over a week. As I could not send clothes I sent thread, needles, some woolen socks and gloves and some soup cubes. When the soup cubes were given away as presents, there was no time to prepare the soup and the cubes were eaten as sweets. It was the first time in their lives that they had tasted these soup cubes. When Pastor Ah Du told them that these presents came all the way from America, he noticed that many of the older people's eyes glistened and wanted him to convey their gratitude to America for their goodness to them.[11]

Of greatest difficulty is the task of rebuilding the morale of any people after the War has wreaked havoc. It left not only physical destruction, but in its chaos, it brought confusion, discouragement, embitterment, and insecurity, along with a host of other spiritual injuries.

12. Stearns, A. P. "Enduring Witness in the First Postwar Year in Foreign Missions" from Missions, September, 1946, page 423.

While bodies are crying to be fed, hearts are heavy and disturbed with a futile and useless sense of existence. This then is our great need--to re-anchor our Christian brothers everywhere. The opportunity is greatest for the missionary since he is near to the heart of the problem. And the native people are grateful for the efforts put forth by the missionaries.

> The welcome given to missionaries returning after years of enforced absence has been deeply touching. One of the earliest to arrive on a devastated field wrote: "So many have come just to talk their hearts out. I have helped others get jobs, and given relief as needed. It seems to mean so frighteningly much to them just to have us attend a meeting or come in for a meal. I know it's not myself. I am inheriting and sharing love belonging to whole generations of devoted missionaries who have won this. It is a priceless privilege to feel this friendship."[12]

Friendship, then, seems to be of most help. And certainly everyone can extend that sense of brotherhood. It cannot be a friendship among only the immediate group out on the field. Any separate group fails in its purpose to become ideally Christian unless it reaches out in all directions. Hence, the Karens cannot be really helped until they are made to feel that they belong to a world-wide Christian community.

> In the true Christian community all persons and peoples are members one of another under the searching judgment of One who is Sovereign, and beneath the tender care of a Father who is God. An ill clad body protests every idle machine. A homeless or poorly housed family pulls at the sinews of every idle hand. A slave worker anywhere jeopardizes the rights of all free men.
>
> In our own country the storms of war were a distant rumbling. In consequence we are left

13. "The Carpenter of Nazareth and the Redeemer of Mankind" from Missions, September, 1946, pages 423, 424.

> strong and prosperous beyond compare. But in the agony of the world we are threatened by a new spiritual isolation--the hardening of our hearts against humanity's pain. From our fields and hands and machines might come a flow of food and tools for the rebuilding of all nations. From our spirits might rise a greater sense of world fellowship and a passion for freedom which will embrace all men...
>
> To meet the needs of this hour the church of Christ must be strengthened in body and in spirit. For social sustenance she looks to the millions of men and women of every race and class and land included in her membership, and she expects of them as Christians in an unchristian society sacrificial and discerning service. For empowering of spirit she turns anew to the Lord of History and the Redeemer of Mankind, the Carpenter of Nazareth, in loyalty to whom she finds her life, and by whose designs the world may be refashioned.[13]

To bring about this world-wide Christian community Latourette offers some valuable essentials that we must have, in his book Toward A World Christian Fellowship. First of all, he reminds us that the tie of a world-wide Christian fellowship must be the common heritage from Christ and the common experience through Him. In a world of many races and cultures it is necessary that we keep this common tie before us at all times to make us as one people. Falling in line with this is another important point which is that a world-wide Christian fellowship at its best must be supra-national rather than international. The fellowship must transcend national lines and there must be a consciousness that the inclusive Christian tie is more potent than that of the nation. Then, also, we must remind ourselves again and again that the fellowship is not alone one between human beings. It is a fellowship of human beings with the

14. Latourette, K. S. Toward A World Christian Fellowship, pages 19-27.

15. Ibid., page 27.

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.[14]

> The tie is not primarily the love of men for one another--although this is important--but the love of God for men. It is a fellowship in which God is the unseen partner. It is the fellowship of the "Church of Christ", a fellowship made possible because "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." It is a fellowship in which men continue to have comradeship through that "Spirit which proceedeth from the Father and the Son."..the hope of realizing a world-wide Christian fellowship is not the effort of men but the continuing presence of God. It is this Presence, working through and transforming imperfect men and women like ourselves... which is at once the center of the fellowship and the ground for confidence that it can be made a reality.[15]

When we have accomplished this, then we will have truly experienced that "in Christ there is no East or West".

From this study of the Karens then there is only one obvious conclusion: that they present a personal challenge to Christians the world around.

The challenge comes to men and women to give their lives in missionary service to the Karen people. These formerly backward, wild, hill people have received Christianity and have grown in their Christian experience and have proved their worth in a Christian community. Due to this definite progress the field among the Karens is even more attractive, and there should be many who would know the joy of service among them.

The Karens do need more missionaries, men and women possessed of the qualities once called for by Adoniram Judson.

16. Short, Stanley E. "The Call of Burma" from World Dominion, Sept.-Oct., 1946, page 266.

> In pleading for helpers, he wrote: "In encouraging young men to come out as missionaries do use the greatest caution. One wrong-headed, obstinate fellow would ruin us. Humble, quiet, persevering men, men of sound sterling talents (though perhaps not brilliant), of decent accomplishments, and some natural aptitude to acquire a language; men of an amiable, yielding temper, willing to take the lowest place, to be the least of all, and servant of all; men who enjoy much closet religion, who live near to God, and are willing to suffer all things for Christ's sake without being proud of it--these are the men. They are the men (and women) who will do most in building a better and a freer Burma."[16]

The challenge comes also to other Christian leaders. Those who are not termed "missionaries" still find themselves personally called to promote the work among the Karens. Pastors everywhere can do much to bring before their communities this group in Burma who deserve every note of friendship.

No one is to escape the challenge. It comes to the layman, also.

> The missionary feels keenly that his own efficiency and the strength of the work as a whole must depend in large degree on the spiritual resources which are behind him in the home land...
>
> Will, then, the people of God in America unite with the missionary, as never before, in that spirit of real self-sacrifice which is demanded not of the missionary alone, but of every true follower of Christ? There is nothing which the servant of God more deeply craves. It is needful for the effective conduct of the work of world evangelization that the entire life and thought of Christ's people everywhere should be bound up in the mighty grip of one common devotion...
>
> Let Christian people everywhere, then, arise. As God has brought peace and prosperity to the Karens of Burma and outpoured his blessing upon them as a race, even though some refused to accept his word, so will God yet outpour his grace and his blessing, his peace and his glory upon all the

17. Harris, E. N. Op. Cit., pages 211, 217-218, 219-220.

> world, and every tongue shall confess and every knee shall bow.[17]

In the face of great hardship among the Karen people today, "let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

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